Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Region 2 Headquarters
3201 Spurgin Road
Missoula, MT 59804
Phone 406-542-5500

May 30, 2018

Dear Interested Citizen:

Enclosed you will find for your review, the draft environmental assessment (DEA) titled "**Pilot-Level Bioassays and Fish Distribution Testing** for the Proposed North Fork Blackfoot River (NFBR) Native Fish Restoration Project."

Background: The DEA addresses planning needs for the potential future project titled the "NFBR Native Fish Restoration Project" (Restoration Project). The larger Restoration Project area is in the NFBR watershed upstream of the North Fork Falls on the North Fork Blackfoot River, which is in the Scapegoat Wilderness and includes portions of the Lolo and the Helena-Lewis & Clark (HLC) national forests. The project area makes an ideal setting for conservation of native trout, as it is protected from reinvasion of fish by the barrier falls and is within a climate shield that should provide suitable habitat in a changing climate. The Restoration Project would be the subject of a future draft environmental assessment issued by FWP and the Lolo and Helena-Lewis & Clark national forests and open to public review and comment. Eventual native fish restoration and conservation in the NFBR would require removing the existing fishery, which is comprised of hybrids of Rainbow Trout, Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout, and Westslope Cutthroat Trout (WCT), followed by translocation of WCT and Bull Trout into the project area. CFT Legumine™ (CFTL) is a commonly used formulation of rotenone, a naturally-derived piscicide (substance used to kill fish), used in stream reclamation in Montana, and would likely be used in the NFBR project area for the Restoration Project, which could begin in 2019.

Current Proposal: The **Pilot-Level Bioassays and Fish Distribution Testing Project** (Bioassays & Testing Project) is the proposed action covered by the current DEA, for the collection of baseline data in 2018 in the HLCNF's portion of the Scapegoat to be used in planning for a potential Restoration Project. The objectives of the Bioassay & Testing Project are to collect data to estimate fish distribution, calculate the volume of CFTL solution and potassium permanganate required to meet Restoration Project goals, and determine spacing of drip stations releasing CFTL. The DEA addresses the potential impacts of releasing CFTL and potassium permanganate on a limited scale in selected stream reaches, and other disturbance associated with presence of fieldworkers implementing the project. Reconnaissance field investigations proposed under the DEA would provide information to guide effective removal of nonnative hybrid fish, while minimizing effects on other aspects of the natural environment, recreation, and human health.

FWP's draft EA may also be obtained by: Mail from Region 2 FWP, 3201 Spurgin Rd., Missoula 59804; phone 406-542-5540; email shrose@mt.gov; or by viewing FWP's website http://fwp.mt.gov (under "News," choose "Recent Public Notices," beginning May 30).

Comments may be made on FWP's website above or may be directed to Sharon Rose by mail to the address above or email to shrose@mt.gov. Comments must be received by FWP no later than June 28, 2018.

Public Hearing: FWP will hold a public hearing in Missoula on June 6 (~~Tuesday~~ Wednesday) at 6:30 p.m. in the Bitterroot Room of the Hilton Garden (3720 North Reserve Street) to discuss the proposal, answer questions, and take public comment.

Further Information: The Lincoln Ranger District *of the HLCNF is in a Scoping phase related to the national forest authorizing and permitting (via a Pesticide Use Permit) FWP's proposed application of pesticides in conjunction with FWP's proposed Bioassays & Testing Project in the Scapegoat Wilderness. Please see the Attachment to this letter for further information.*

As part of the decision-making process under the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA), I plan to issue the Decision Notice for this EA soon after the end of the public comment period.

Sincerely,

Randy Arnold
Regional Supervisor

RA/sr

Attachment

The Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest (HLCNF) would be responsible for authorizing and permitting the application of pesticides in the Scapegoat Wilderness. The Lincoln Ranger District is now scoping this proposal for the next 30 days. The Forest Service (FS) Responsible Official would like to get your comments on that portion of the overall project that the FS has the authorization to approve. Your feedback on this proposal will assist in refining project design criteria and identifying additional issues not raised during the ongoing collaborative process. Comments specific to the proposed action that identify a cause-effect relationship, a location or specific issue are most helpful.

More information on this project can be found on the HLCNF website at: https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=53855. Or call the Lincoln Ranger District at 406-362-7000.

Please submit comments to the Lincoln Ranger District by electronic mail (email) to comments-northern-helena-lincoln@fs.fed.us with "North Fork Native Fish" in the subject line or send written correspondence to USDA-Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest, Lincoln Ranger District, 1569 Highway 200 Lincoln, MT 59639. Please include with all correspondence; the project name, your name/organization and a return address. Names and addresses of those who comment will become part of the public record for this project. Your comments to the Lincoln Ranger District are appreciated and will be most helpful in the continued design and analysis of the project. Please see the website in the above paragraph for information on comment deadline.

The HLCNF will use the FS Minimum Requirement Decision Guide (MRDG) to analyze the feasibility and use of pesticides, among other options, to minimize impacts to wilderness character. The MRDG will direct the authorizing decisions made by both FWP Region 2 and the Lincoln Ranger District. If FWP Region 2 authorizes our decision, the Lincoln District Ranger will issue a separate decision and Pesticide Use Permit (PUP).